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THE NATIONAL MUSIC OF POLAND

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THE NATIONAL MUSIC OF POLAND

ITS CHARACTER AND SOURCES

BY

MARGUERITE WALAUX

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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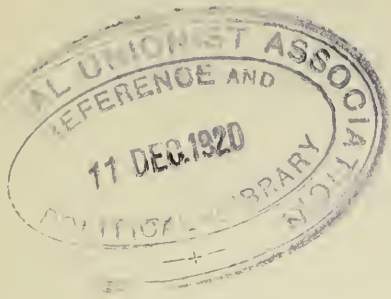

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Polish people and the sentiments which evoke its history	11
Polish music considered as the expression of ideas, aspirations, and vital energy of the Polish people	12
Spirit of independence	13
Melancholy and not despair as one of the features of Polish music	14
Principal stages of the history of Polish music	16
Influence of the Italian School	16
Hymn "Boga Rodzica"	16
Polish religious music and its origins	17
Folk songs	18
Polonaise	19
Mazurek	21
"Dumy"	22
Dainos	23
Kings of Poland patronizing music	23
Music in Poland at the end of the eighteenth century	25
Stanislas August Poniatowski and music	26
Polish opera	26
Kaminski, Stefani, Elsner, Kurpinski, Boguslawski	27
F. Chopin in the evolution of Polish music	27
Chopin's life	30
Chopin and Polish romanticism	34
Chopin's music and Polish soul	37
Chopin's mazurkas	37
Chopin's polonaises	39
Chopin's waltzes	39
Chopin's ballads	40
Chopin's nocturnes	40
Chopin's preludes	41
Stanislas Moniuszko	42
Polinski's opinion on the character of the genius of Moniuszko	42
Conclusion	43

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INTRODUCTION

It has afforded me a real pleasure to be allowed to have my name associated with Madame Walaux's study of "The National Music of Poland." And this, not only, I may say, because I am a Polish musician myself, but because in a very few words Madame Walaux has so admirably summed up the history and characteristics of my native music. Her brochure is very informative. Indeed, I am not aware of any existing work in the English language which deals so well in so brief a space with this subject so near to my heart. Apart from this, however, apart altogether from the personal equation, the subject of Polish music is surely one of which the world, and especially the English musical world, with which I have had the honour and the pleasure of being for many years intimately associated, is likely to hear a great deal in the future. My own hope is that such Polish music as I have been able to introduce into my various Slavonic concert programmes in London will be taken, as it were, merely as samples of what Poland possesses.

Believe me, in England, far too little is known of the wealth of Polish music. But I live, nevertheless, in the sure and certain hope that a day will dawn, after the war, when the multitude of music-lovers in

England will find as warm a place in their hearts for the music of my country, as before the war and since has been found for that of other Slavonic countries.

I feel sure that the more one hears of the genuine Polish music the more one comes to love it for its emotionalism, its definite character, and its beauty, for that, in point of fact, which gives the breath of life to the music which appeals directly to you English.

It is my own hope that from a new Poland, which is inevitable after the war, the national musical element will be more strongly developed in the younger school of composers, and that its expression will become crystallized.

EMIL MLYNARSKI.

THE NATIONAL MUSIC OF POLAND

While still boys and girls our young hearts were stirred with admiration for a people so valiant as the Polish people have undoubtedly been at every stage of their history. That noble national character which marks the movements of a Sobieski as he sallies forth to the succour of Austria sore menaced by the invasion of the Turk, or the generous spontaneity of a Kosciuszko, embarking for free America to range himself resolutely on the side of the weaker in the fight for the independence of the United States, the heroic death of Prince Joseph Poniatowski, indelibly stamp on every young and generous spirit an impression of beautiful and elevated thought.

In later years, when we get to know the complete story of that scandalous political intervention in the affairs of Poland which historians dignify by the name of high diplomacy, our admiration and sympathy only grow greater than ever. This high access of mind in which we rest has never been better expressed than by George Brandès: "We love Poland," he says, "as we love freedom.

Poland is a symbol, a symbol of all for which the best of the human race have either loved or fought." [1]

We have only to consider the history of the oppression of Poland, says the same Brandès, to find there on the one hand "all that is most hateful and despicable," and on the other hand "all that is most lovable and lustrous. In the first the contrasts of human life are found in bold relief. In the second, the cosmos is concentrated as in an essence."

How can any true-hearted spirit avoid cherishing a sincere and continual interest in the history of such a country?—a country whose chief crime, in the eyes of the States who combined together to divide and then destroy her, was this, that she possessed a civilization distinct from their own, a civilization which united her with all that was most progressive in Western Europe.

Brandès, in his noteworthy work on Poland, which is interesting both as the impressions of a traveller and also as the result of close and intimate study of Polish literary and artistic history, speaks of the Poles as a people dowered with enthusiasm which yet needed to be corrected by practical experience, as endowed with vivid imagination, quite uncommon intelligence, and beautiful, exalted feeling, as loving all intense and delicate, sensuous and intellectual enjoyments," but also, above all, who worshipped independence to the point of insanity,

[1] "Poland," p. 48.

freedom to the extent of the *liberum veto*, and who even now, when they had lost their independence and freedom, had remained faithful to their old love.

The German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, on the day following the fall of Warsaw, speaking in the Reichstag, paid a high tribute to this spirit of independence which the Polish nation has retained in the face of any trial, and which nothing has been able to humiliate. And it is this national characteristic which manifests itself to an intense degree in the works of writers and poets of this oppressed nation.

But it is not only the study of Polish literature, above all that of the nineteenth century, which endows us with an understanding of the aspirations and the soul of this people, it is equally by the revelation of her fine arts and her music that we are enabled to grasp and comprehend them.

Music is our subject here, the national music of Poland, in which is revealed in a striking manner in the works of her composers, and above all in those of Chopin, Moniuszko, or Noskowski, the soul of this heroic people in all its individuality, agonies, joys, hopes, aspirations, loves and hates, and in its most marked peculiarities. From this last point of view the two songs, Wibicki's "Jeszcze Polska nie zginela" ("Poland not yet Lost") and Ujejski's "Z dymem Pozarow" ("With the Smoke of the Fires") are characteristic. These songs express the despair of the younger race at seeing the hopes of Poland brought to naught, and reflects the lofty,

burning earnestness, the love of country, as a religion.

Wibicki's song, the expression of the bright hopes of the race, even after the blow of the third partition has fallen, is an extremely careless, merry song, the ballad of heroic thoughtlessness, joy to live, to sing, to fight. The first is a psalm, the second a march which approaches a mazurka.

It ought to be borne in mind that in Polish music melancholy never leads to despair. There is always something hopeful in the most intense sadness. We find this impression again, moreover, in the music of Chopin, who draws it into the rhythm of the popular melodies of his country, idealized by his poetic nature. We find it, above all, in the "Prélude in B Minor," which is to some extent the realization of it. Kleczynski explains it for us thus: "The picture which is formed is that of drops of rain falling at regular intervals, which by their continual patter bring the mind to a state of sadness; a melody full of tears is heard through the rush of the rain; in passing to the key of C sharp minor it rises from the depths of the bass to a prodigious crescendo, indicative of the terror which Nature in its deathly aspect excites in the heart of man. Here, again, the form does not allow the ideas to become too sombre; notwithstanding the melancholy which seizes you, a feeling of tranquil grandeur revives you." [1]

[1] Kleczynski, "F. Chopin, De l'interpretation de ses œuvres," pp. 26 and 27.

The soul of Poland, the inspiration of these melodies, is an impulse towards hope and liberty; this liberty is the goal, the end to which she aspires. This is contested with her through the centuries, but she carries on the struggle without allowing herself to be weakened.

This all-powerful idea is found again and again in Polish music, in its rhythm, its inspiration, and in its melancholy charm. This melancholy, in which there always sounds an under-current of hope, is rather the outcome of the thoughtful and sentimental temperament than of the dejection of despair occasioned by the misfortunes of the fatherland. Here is no resigned, quiescent spirit, but the true soul of the heroic Pole, chivalrous, careless, and light-hearted, which delivers itself of sadness in songs, but whose joy is tinged with intense melancholy. Here is the unchained spirit of Poland, which no Government has ever been able to fetter, and which, notwithstanding the centuries of suffering, has always kept untouched her individuality, originality, and romanticism, of which poetry and music are the living and harmonious manifestations.

The Poles are gifted with an essentially musical temperament, and their taste in music is recognized all over the world. It is not true, however, that this taste and aptitude is visible only in the last century.

Polish music is of as ancient an origin as her history; this fact will be seen by the following

account of the principal stages of her development through the centuries.

According to Sowinski,[1] the history of music in Poland may be divided into three distinct parts :—

1. Early music dating from the appearance of music in the country, and finishing in the reigns of the Sigismunds.

2. Music of the Golden Age, including several phases, and attaining its highest perfection during the sixteenth century, following next the decadence of literature. In this general shipwreck only a few works of religious composers survive; these even are forgotten. This period terminated in 1764.

3. Modern music from the reign of Stanislas August Poniatowski to our own times.

In Poland, as elsewhere, the art of music is affected by many outside influences, before attaining originality and assuming a truly national character. For many years, following the example of many other European nations, it found inspiration from the Italian School. The grave beauty of this music and its sweetness seemed to fit it at this time to be the melodious organ of Christianity. Bohemians and Poles, the first Christians among northern nations, went to Rome to study there, and feel the inspiration of the artistic beauties of the eternal city. There it was that St. Adalbert studied the elements of the Gregorian Chant. In 995 he composed the hymn of "Boga Rodzica"

[1] "Polish and Slav Musicians" (1857).

(the Mother of God, worshipped by the Poles and Slavs), which is found engraved on the saint's tomb. It was not till the eleventh century that the ecclesiastical chant became known in Poland.

Pope John VIII gave permission for the use of the national language in the services of the Church; this permission gave a national character to religious music in Poland, whereas in other countries sacred music progressed no farther than the Gregorian Chant or the Plain Chant. At this time there are found in Polish music charming airs for Christmas, which, together with certain old canticles, made up the first song-books.

From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century a number of composers flourished in Poland; l'Abbé Witowski composed several religious chants in his native tongue. Jean de Kampa Lodzia, Bishop of Posen, is identified with hymns of great value. Later Wenceslas Brzozowski (fifteenth century), poet, priest, and musician, left the *Canzionale*, a collection including setting for several voices. The golden age of the Sigismunds was also productive of noble compositions, the most important of which was, without doubt, the *Psalter* of Nicholas Gomolka.

For a long time in Poland only sacred music existed, inspired by religion and the Church. At this time, moreover, all the arts looked to religion for their inspiration, as to a never-failing fount. The history of architecture can be learned only by a study of the churches; painting dealt exclu-

sively with subjects drawn from the life of Christ; and music itself was seldom of anything but a sacred character. Dramatic music was united with the religious drama, in which satiric songs occasionally made their appearance.

There was, however, some military music, which consisted solely in flourishes of trumpets and cymbals, and there was also Court music. The temperament of the early Poles led them to love music; they had a preference for the glad and joyous rather than the sad and melancholy. Hymns, however, charmed their ears, and they amused themselves by listening to them, but it was their characteristic national airs that held the greatest attraction, the melody, accent, and rhythm of which brought out in a wonderful way the feeling inherent in the nation.

It would be difficult to compile a history of these Folk Songs. Many of them have never been written down, and are handed on by tradition and by the ancient chronicles, which give merely the title and the words. Songs exist on every theme: historic, bucolic, erotic, etc. Others accompany Polish dances, and their rhythm is still a source of inspiration to modern Polish composers, as is the case with the Polonaise and the Mazurek. There are numberless folk songs in existence belonging to every period, and even to the last century; François Karpinski is responsible for some charming examples, the words and music of which are familiar to every one.

The *Polonaise* is one of the most characteristic manifestations of the art of music in Poland. The germ of it may be recognized in the motive of an old Christmas song, and in the air of "Wzlobie lezy" the rhythm and the finale of this old dance of striking originality is found; the music of which resounded at the pompous feasts of the old Polish lords and at the Court of the Kings.

The exact date of the invention of the Polonaise is not known. The Court must have been its birthplace. Karasowski [1] tells us that "tradition assigns to the Polonaise the following origin: when the dynasty of the Jagellons died out, Henry of Anjou, son of Catherine de Medicis, was in 1573 elected King of Poland. The following year he received the representatives of the nation in solemn state at Cracow Castle, and the gentlemen made their wives slowly defile before the King, keeping step to an accompaniment of music. Every time a foreign prince was elected to the throne this ceremony was repeated, and from it was gradually developed the national dance of the Polonaise. It became a political dance. It is really a march, a processional dance, grave, moderate, flowing, and by no means stereotyped. It is at once the symbol of war and love, a vivid pageant of martial splendour, a weaving, cadenced, voluptuous dance, the pursuit of shy, coquettish woman by the fierce warrior. Despite its essentially masculine mould, it is given a feminine title; formerly it was called "Polonais." Liszt wrote

[1] "Life of Chopin."

of it: "In this form the noblest traditional feelings of ancient Poland are represented." The Polonaise is the true and purest type of Polish national character, as in the course of centuries it was developed partly through the political position of the kingdom towards east and west, partly through an indefinable, peculiar inborn disposition of the entire race. In the development of the Polonaise everything co-operated which specifically distinguished the nation from others. In the Poles of departed times manly resolution was united with glowing devotion to the object of their love. Their knightly heroism was sanctioned by high, soaring dignity, and even the laws of gallantry and the national costume exerted an influence over the turns of the dance. The Polonaises are the keystone in the development of this form. They belong to the most beautiful of Chopin's inspirations. With their energetic rhythm they electrify, to the point of exerted demonstration, even the sleepiest of indifference. Chopin was born too late, and left his native hearth too early to be initiated into the original character of the Polonaise as danced through his own observation. But what others imparted to him with regard to it was supplemented by his fancy and his nationality.

Mickiewicz, the national poet of Poland in the nineteenth century, consecrated some beautiful verses to the Polonaise, in his celebrated "Pan Tadeusz," Book 12, "Let us love one another."

The melody of the Polonaise is sometimes simple,

but its rhythm is somewhat martial and of a warlike enchantment. It is solemn and possesses great fascination. The conclusion suggests the stately manners of the Middle Ages. Written in triple time, it is grave, but gaiety is not debarred, which rendered it popular among the people, whose favourite dance it was up to the close of the seventeenth century.

The movement of the *Mazur* or *Mazurek* is accentuated in more lively fashion than that of the Polonaise. It is also written in triple time, but more licence is allowed, and the contretemps is marked. The Mazurek is full of feeling, and is often melancholy; it is truly poetical, and is representative of the national character. Emanating from the people, it was adopted by all classes; it was claimed with joy among the rich, and charmed young and old alike.

The first Mazureks date from the players on the lute in the fifteenth century. They were of popular composition, and were of simple construction with two repetitions, with a prelude or "ritournelle," a kind of improvization of the village fiddlers, and the words were in praise of the simple life. Later their range was enlarged. They are exceedingly numerous. Some treat of history, others of the rustic life, dancing or love. Poets of renown composed words for them, which were set to music by celebrated composers. The Mazurek is the true national song of Poland, the embodiment of the national character. Chopin made it popular in

Europe, and Polish opera drew on it to a considerable extent. Chopin penetrated the most deeply into the national sanctuary, and his melancholy genius made more than one tender heart weep and vibrate. Liszt says: "Coquetteries, varieties, fantasies, elegies, vagues, emotions, passions, conquests, struggles upon which the safety or favours of others depend, all, all meet in this dance." He gives a wild, whirling, highly coloured narrative of the Mazurka with a coda of extravagant praise on the beauty and fascination of Polish women.

In Poland the Mazurka is not the dance which is called by that name, but a long, difficult, and impassioned national dance, in which the gentlemen and ladies, though they dance hand in hand, constantly take different steps in the same time.

The *Krakowiak* (French *Cracovienne*) is born of the people. Its movement is quick and bright, and it is written in double time. Polish peasants dance it in national costume, which adds to the picturesque appearance of the dance; added to this there are often satirical couplets, which the dancer sings to his partner. The poems of Miaskowski (1622) prove that the Krakowiak originated in the seventeenth century.

The *Dumy* or *Dumki* (reveries) are of earlier origin, and their music is of a particular kind: they modulate from the minor key to the relative major, and vice versa. This minor modulation gives them a plaintive and heartrending effect.

They are nearly all in double time, and very slow, and were accompanied formerly by the *guzla* or *gousla*, an ancient Slav instrument which has been replaced in modern times by the *bandura* or *bandurka* and the *téorbe*. The Ukrainian dumkis (wrongly termed Russian songs) are sung generally without accompaniment. Among the Zaporogues there were bandouristes, who sang a kind of dumki accompanied on the bandura, the sad and yearning melodies of which filled the soul with emotion and melancholy.

Lithuania, the history of which has been intimately connected with that of Poland, has supplied us with many popular songs; for example, the *Dainos* (a gay air). These tunes are simple, sweet, and fresh, and are sung in Lithuanian. Some of them are of very early origin. Modern composers have made collections of them. Rhésa has translated a book of them into German with music, under the title "Dainos, or Lithuanian Folk Songs," and Chopin composed one.

The early kings of Poland used to love and patronize music. They were greeted by the sound of music when they entered one of the towns of their kingdom, or when they visited the castle of one of those lords whose wealth was the astonishment of Europe. They surrounded themselves with hired musicians at great expense, and lute-players and other performers of all kinds formed part of their suite continually. The nobles, too, had their orchestras, and the lordly dwellings echoed to the

sound of music, which accompanied all their feasts and festivals.

King Sigismund I and his son, Sigismund August, professed a veritable cult for the art of music. Under their reigns it attained a high state of perfection. It was, in truth, the music of the Great Century. The Court was the show-ground of numberless talents. Musicians were paid fabulous sums. In the Royal choir composed of celebrated musicians, among whom were many Italians, the combined effect produced was indeed wonderful. It was also in the reign of Sigismond I that the first college or chapel for the celebration of the Mass to music was instituted. No other country in Europe possessed such an institution, which received the name of College of the Rorariste, and was attached to the cathedral at Cracow. Its foundation dates from 1542. The original of the Royal Charter given to this chapel, and its original music, can be found among the archives of the cathedral. It was productive of marvellous results in the interpretation of sacred music at this time. The sixteenth century was fruitful, moreover, in masterpieces, as is illustrated by the works of Broscius Jacques Lubelczyk, Gorczyn, Liban de Lignica, Spangenberg, Sigismund Lauxman, Simon Starowolski, l'Abbé Gorczycki, and many others.

Under Sigismund III music attained to its highest degree of perfection in Poland. His chapels surpassed in talent and magnificence anything previously seen and heard. Jean Zamoyski, Batory,

Wladislas IV, Jean Sobieski, proved themselves ardent patrons of music, and endeavoured to spread the taste for it among the people, whose efforts they encouraged. At that time there was, perhaps, no other country in Europe where music was held in such high honour. Nearly every lord and every high dignitary had his own theatre, orchestra, opera, and even ballet. The reign of the Kings of Saxony marked the progress in particular of instrumental music. August II was generous to the point of folly in the upkeep of his chapel, and his orchestra was recognized as the finest in Germany.

After centuries of brilliance, music in Poland passed through several phases. It followed in the wake of political decadence, and its progress from that time was arrested. The institutions of sacred music were no more. All perished ; but dramatic music had new birth in the reign of Stanislas August Poniatowski.

At the end of the eighteenth century dire misfortunes overwhelmed this unfortunate country, and there was a revival of religious music. New canticles were composed, as well as fine music for the Mass. The Church from that time had her modern repertory. At Posen were published a series of sacred chants to be sung during the Mass. Elsner set them to music later on the words of Brodzinski, and his example was followed by Felinski, who was inspired by the words of Wenzyk, and by Kurpinski by those of Minasowicz.

Sacred music was always very remarkable in

Poland, and, above all, at Cracow, which is, according to Sowinski, "the cradle of the music of the Church."

Stanislas August Poniatowski had an enormous influence on the development of the music of his country. He saw the opening of the modern era, which is characterized by the appearance of the National Polish Opera.

This King adored music in all its forms; his choir, composed of native and foreign musicians, was one of the best of the time. His example was followed by the great lords, several of whom were recognized as distinguished performers. In the castles were excellent orchestras. Musicians were well looked after there, and certain great lords became notable composers; for example, Prince Michel Oginski (1765-1833), whose works, and, above all, his charming Polonaises, had distinctive national characteristics and became popular in Europe. At this time of rapid progress in the art of music and its general perfection in Europe, the Polish opera made its first appearance (1778). Italian opera had been in existence at the Court of Warsaw since 1633, but the poetic and literary movement of the end of the eighteenth century created the Polish opera, of interest by its character and its direct relation with the youth of Chopin.

The first Polish operas composed by Kaminski and Stefani followed the German style and the fashion of the French comic opera. The new and original element was found in the employment of

popular themes. Their subjects were taken from peasant life—"Krakowiaki i Gorale" ("Cracovians and Mountaineers") of Stefani. The ideas of these two composers were taken up again at the beginning of the eighteenth century by J. Elsner, the professor of Chopin, and by Ch. Kurpinski, creators of the first historical Polish operas. At this time the national opera became the most perfect expression of the musical art in Poland, and Elsner was vexed and surprised that his good-natured pupil, Chopin, never became the composer of operas, and that he confined himself to musical forms of less magnitude.

Boguslawski contributed largely to the advancement of the national opera. It was he who produced the six operas of Kaminski, which enjoyed considerable success. He translated the "Axur" of Salieri, with fine results (1793). But the greatest work of this time was the "Cracovians and Mountaineers" of Stefani. Its success was immense. Elsner composed several operas which met with great approval, as well as an operetta of Kamienski and an opera of Caiëtana, the master of the chapel of Stanislas Auguste.

All this is a proof that music was held in great esteem in Poland, and that it had been cultivated there from an early date; but it is only subsequent to Chopin that this music attracted the attention of foreign nations. In truth Chopin was the first Polish musician who gained for Poland a world-wide fame in the world of music. There

are two different reasons for this. The first is that Chopin was the inventor of an entirely new pianoforte life. His music invoked general admiration, both by the exquisite form and by the sublime beauty in it. Centuries of intense and uninterrupted work are usually necessary before a nation can produce a genius such as Chopin. As we have seen in previous pages of our historical exposition of Polish music, this work was accomplished slowly in Poland, and the great-hearted musician, loved and admired by all, was worthy of the effort.

The second reason was set forth by Schumann and Liszt. "How can we understand," asks Schumann in his letters, "why Chopin interests us so greatly, attracts us more than other composers of our day? It is because of the strong and distinctive nationality that animates him: the nationality of Poland."

Liszt, after having heard Chopin's "Funeral March," declared, "A Pole alone could have written that funeral march, because all the inborn sublimity and introspect of a people cries out, through Chopin, in that marvellous inspiration, which seems the mourning cry of a whole nation following the bier of their dearest hopes."

Count Tarnowski [1] is perfectly right when he says that, whether it be with the inexpressible melancholy and forlorn wailings of a funeral march, or the reckless abandon of a tarantella,

[1] "Chopin, as Revealed by Extracts from his Diary," pp. 6–8.

it is only Chopin who can express to foreigners that inspiration, original, melancholy, homely, and patriotic, which is the feature of Polish poetry, because his music is enlivened by that same inspiration and impressed by it. It is, as it were, a translation of that poetry. Therefore it is in the history of Poland, subsequent to the partition, that his music has its great significance and merit. It contains in itself the essence and expression of the spirit which created Polish poetry. It represents to the outside world the leading spirit of the Polish nation so thoroughly that Chopin has acquired glory for himself and for his countrymen, a citizenship in the realm of music.

There is a likeness between Chopin and his contemporary Polish poets of the Romantic school; there is similarity of feeling and inspiration; there are even some similarities of disposition. And if to this be added the charm of a nature strangely noble and refined, with beautiful and exalted feeling, with a rich, fervid imagination, with quite an unusual intelligence, with rare tenderness to suffering in others, one discovers elements that go to make one of the most enchanting and interesting personalities of Poland.

To sensitiveness, tenderness, and a genuine delicacy of feeling he united a childlike gaiety and humour. It is true that his moments of humour and forgetfulness never lasted long, as in some of the mazurkas, where the sincere, almost rude, gaiety ends in the more intense despondency.

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There is a widespread, but erroneous, opinion that the music of Chopin lacks manliness, moral and intellectual. But, as Huneker has pointed out, if Chopin's manners were a trifle feminine, his brain was masculine, electric, and his soul courageous. His Polonaises, Ballads, Scherzi, and Études need a mighty grip—a grip mental and physical.

Chopin was born in 1809, near Warsaw. In infancy he could not hear music without crying. In 1827 Chopin left his regular studies at the Warsaw Lyceum, and devoted his time to music. "He was much in the country," says James Huneker in his biography of Chopin, "and singing of the Polish peasants, thus laying the corner-stone of his art as a national composer." In 1828 he went to Berlin, and this trip gave him a foretaste of the outer world. Stephen Heller, who saw Chopin in 1830, described him as pale, of delicate health, and not destined for a long life. He was constantly admonished by his relatives to keep his coat closed. Chopin went to Berlin under the protection of his father's friend, Professor Jarocki, to attend a great scientific congress. Count Tarnowski relates that Chopin left Warsaw with a light heart. On the way home he stopped at a place called Zullichau, and improvized on Polish airs so charmingly that the departure was delayed.

Tarnowski declares that the Polish poet Julius Slowacki was Chopin's warmest friend and a starting-point of inspiration for the composer.

In July 1829 Chopin arrived at Vienna, where his improvization on the Polish tune called "Chmiel" and a theme from "La Dame Blanche" stirred up much enthusiasm at the Karntnerthor Theatre. The Press was favourable. According to Huneker his style was admired, and voted original. A remark by a lady, "It is a pity his appearance is so insignificant," reached the composer's ear and caused him an evil quarter of an hour, for he was morbidly sensitive, but being, like most Poles, secretive, managed to hide it. Encouraged by his triumph, Chopin gave, on August 18th, a second concert on the same stage. This time he played the Polish "Krakowiak."

By September 12th, after a brief sojourn in Breslau, Chopin was again safe at home in Warsaw. About this time he fell in love with Constantia Gladowska, a singer and pupil of the Warsaw Conservatoire. According to Huneker,[1] Chopin shrank from coarseness of all sorts, and the Fates only know what he must have suffered at times from George Sand and her gallant band of retainers. "To this impressionable man," writes Huneker, "Parisian badinage—not to call it anything stronger —was positively antipathetical."

On March 17, 1830, Chopin gave his first concert in Warsaw. In November 1830, before the outbreak of the Polish Revolution, he left Warsaw for Vienna.

"A thousand times," says Huneker, "he thought

[1] "Chopin."

of renouncing his artistic ambitions and rushing to Poland to fight for his country. He did not do so, and this indecision—it was not cowardice—is our gain. Chopin put his patriotism, his wrath, and his heroism into his Polonaises. That is why we have them now."

At Stutgart, when Chopin heard of the capture of Warsaw by the Russians on September 8, 1831, his agitation was terrible. "Sometimes," writes he in his diary, "I groan, suffer, and despair at the piano! O God, move the earth that it may swallow the humanity of this century! May the most cruel fortune fall upon the French, that they did not come to our aid."

He did not go to Warsaw, but at the end of September started for France, arriving early in October 1831. "A neurotic man," says Huneker, "his tissues trembling, his sensibilities aflame, the offspring of a nation doomed to pain and partition, it was quite natural for him to go to France—Poland has ever been her historic client—the France that overheated all Europe. Chopin, born after two revolutions, the true child of insurrection, chose Paris for his second home."

Count Tarnowski considers that the time at Warsaw was the free, peaceful, and happy period of Chopin's life; the other (when he lived abroad) was marred by the storms and sorrows of later years. Warsaw is connected with the thought and love of his country; the other with the memory of that other love which poured so much bitterness

into his life. All this preyed upon a tragic nature, that state bordering on despair which is perceptible throughout his compositions. Possibly such a nature was predestined never to attain equanimity; yet if his surroundings had been different, if he had remained in his country and in the ordinary way of life, in course of time his health might have become better and his talent would have developed with more virility. Thrown suddenly out of gear, as it were, he became more and more unbalanced, and his talent developed in the direction of effeminate tenderness and sentimentality. This disposition appears soon after his departure from Warsaw.

Soon after his arrival in Paris, Chopin was known throughout Europe. It seems that the peculiarly Polish form of the Mazurek became the natural expression of the one feeling which was the background of Chopin's disposition, as it was of Poland's—namely, sorrow. This sorrow breaks forth freely in all his compositions; but it is strange that when he composes under the influence of bitterness or despair he pours his genius into the most varied forms, excepting only that of the mazurka.

What strikes one in Chopin is the refined style of the romance, the morbid charm of a play full of caress and tenderness. One has not always understood, said Count Tarnowski, that behind the strangeness of his rhythms resided the deepest classic culture.

Like poetry, the music of Chopin is the flower of romanticism, not only because, as a composer, he belongs to the school of romanticism, but much more because his music has the same charm, the same character, the same failings as Polish romantic poetry. It has, like that poetry, the highest tenderness of sentiment; it has originality and a great richness of forms and ideas; it has also much vivacity and colouring of imagination, and in that imagination there is something veiled, ethereal, and undefined, alike through sensitive feelings and patriotic inspiration. It has faults: an overstrained melancholy and an interior discord that appear in thoughts which are sometimes incomprehensible and in a strange and sometimes eccentric execution. The Polish emigration gave to the country the most beautiful works in literature. The same may be said of the music of Chopin which, under the influence of the same feelings, produced the highest inspirations and the most Polish in spirit and form.

To give a competent analysis of Chopin's works would require a volume to itself, and that will not be our purpose. To appreciate their importance we must consider the circumstances amid which they were written. The period to which his earliest composition belongs was one of apparent calm. After the Battle of Waterloo, which took place between the peaceful settlements of the two Congresses of Vienna, the nations began to breathe freely once more. In Poland national

pride grew stronger and stronger and impelled the true lovers of their country to an active propaganda for the improvement of its internal affairs. Men of genius whose lives were devoted to the search after knowledge threw all their energies into the discoveries of new truths and to casting fresh light on old ones. Everywhere was the breath of a new spiritual life full of soaring aspiration; and rising from the exhaustion of the Napoleonic wars, the nation seriously gave itself to the revival of art and literature.

A passionate battle began between the two schools of poetry: the classic and the romantic. The great Polish poet Mickiewicz, the author of "Grazyna," "Dziady," and "Pan Tadeusz," stood at the head of the romantic school, and by his genius triumphed over the other.

According to Brandès,[1] the Polish literature of the nineteenth century bears a peculiar stamp, apart from the peculiarities issuing from the national character, in that it developed in a country which had recently ceased to exist as an independent State. For this reason the literature, and especially the poetry, came to supply, as it were, the place of a national life which was lost at the partition of the State. It gained thereby in spiritual exaltation, but necessarily lost in variety and freedom.

Polish romanticism, as Brandès masterly describes it, is intelligent and imaginative, splendour-loving and visionary, with a tendency to chivalrous,

[1] Page 192.

virtuous, and religious aspirations. It was akin to the French in its fickleness; it differed from the French in the nature of that fickleness. The Frenchman is capricious when his native rationalism leads him to shatter his historic heritage, the Pole when temperament or enthusiasm carries him away.

Throughout the romantic literature of Poland we find here and there features so realistic that they do not seem to belong to the period. Some of the poets carry realism so far that they even introduce living or recently deceased persons into their poems. But that which is peculiarly Polish is that, hand in hand with the hankering after reality and futurity, there is an unconquerable tendency to abstraction, allegory, superstition. "They are," says Brandès, "at once realists and spiritualists. Two circumstances united to make their poems abstract and allegorical: first, the propensity to mysticism which lay in the inmost recesses of their souls and which, after having slumbered for a while, was easily awakened in them all since they had been educated as Catholics from the first; in the next place, the political oppression, the consideration of their censorship which compelled them to describe their thoughts by circumlocution and to etherealize the outlines of the beings whom they painted. In reality, Polish poetry, by its very obscure and prophetic character, has had a greater bearing on the future of the nation than a logical and convincing poetry could have had. It inspired

perseverance, self-reliance, firm faith in the future, and obstinate optimism, which were so much the more remarkable as no country seemed likely to offer a more fruitful soil for pessimism."

Slowacki, Krasinski, and especially Mickiewicz, the most celebrated poets of modern romanticism in Poland, whose works and poetry reflect the most peculiarly national characteristics, impressed an intense influence on the music of their time, and they are, it is said, the leaders who preceded Chopin into the artistic world. The music of Chopin, inspired almost entirely by his country, its rural life, its dances, its past splendour, its sorrows and desperate fights, seems the harmony of the soul of romantic poetry. Living among young Poles, who were enthusiastic about folk-poetry, regarding it—not without reason—as the basis of all poetry, Chopin sought out national melodies for himself, seeking by careful artistic presentation to secure for them a lasting place in musical literature. In this he succeeded much better than any other composer has done. No one was so well able to reproduce the peculiarly melancholy strain which runs through all the Polish melodies. A spontaneity, at once noble and natural, pervades Chopin's music. It is the complement, or rather the illustration, of the national poetry. An eminent Polish historian has said: "Chopin's music is of supreme importance because it represents the nation more gloriously in the domain of the love of art than that of any other composer. It gives us the

honour of an independent position such as we had never attained before."

Chopin's earliest works are undoubtedly the result of the musical tendencies of the age. Traditional forms opened to him the gates of the temple where the greatest masters of the pianoforte sit enthroned. But into these forms he infused his own creative genius. Chopin's imagination struck deeper chords than previous pianoforte composers; he inaugurated a new era and cut a way for himself, not for the sake of surpassing others, but by the unconscious impulse of his own originality. Most of his works are written for the piano, the instrument he preferred to any other. He shows also some preference for the violoncello. "Its elegiac tone was in harmony with his own nature."

Chopin was very partial to the dance forms—mazurka, polonaise, waltz, tarantelle, cracovienne, and bolero—which he was the first truly to idealize, but of the large number of his mazurkas it is difficult to say which is the best. Some of those mazurkas are perhaps among the most effective which, in spite of the tripping dance measure, display melancholy, as though the composer had indulged in a momentary diversion and neurotic intoxication to return the more sadly to his original gloom.

"The plaintive little mazurka of two lines," says Huneker, "the Seventh Prelude is a mere silhouette of the national dance. Yet in its measure is compressed all Polish Mazovia."

"Do you know Chopin's sorrowful mazurkas," asks Ehlert, "those pathetic dances in which the deepest, the most heartfelt sorrow has donned red buskins, to weep itself to death amid a bacchanal tumult? I have one of those in my own mind now: anything sadder you can scarcely imagine:—

> Ye still must dance, poor feet so weary
> In gay shoes drest,
> Though 'twere for ye a fate less sad and dreary
> 'Neath earth to rest.

Poor Chopin! Was he afflicted by the sorrow of his people, or by a secret woe, a fatality of love?"

Chopin's *polonaises* may be divided into two groups: the one those with marked rhythm, displaying the martial element; the other, the dreamy, melancholy feeling peculiar to the master. The "Fantasie Polonaise," in A flat major, holds a position distinct from both these groups. It is intended to represent the national struggle, and concludes, therefore, with a proud hymn of victory. Chopin's belief in the ultimate victory of the Polish nation after its many bitter trials, a feeling so well depicted in the poetry of Mickiewicz, Krasinski, and Slowacki, the greatest poets of that period, speaks out clearly in this, the most finished of his larger pianoforte works.

Chopin's *waltzes*, musically considered, offer less of interest and novelty than his other compositions. What they lose in the rhythm of the dances they

gain in innate grace and outward brilliancy. The most interesting are those which are pervaded by that peculiar, dreamy, melancholy vein which is one of the chief charms of Chopin's inspiration.

It has been said of the Chopin waltzes that they are dances of the soul and not of the body. Their animated rhythms, insouciant airs, and brilliant, coquettish atmosphere represent the true atmosphere of the ballroom. They are exquisite exemplars of social intimacy and aristocratic abandon. Schumann declares that the dancers of these valses should at least be countesses.

The four *ballads* are amongst the finest and most original of his works. Chopin said to Schumann that he had been inspired to the creation of the ballads by some poems of Mickiewicz. There is about them a certain narrative character which is particularly well rendered.

"None of Chopin's compositions," says Niecks, "surpasses in masterliness of form and beauty and poetry of content his ballads." Louis Ehlert says of the four ballads: "Each differs entirely from the others, and they have but one thing in common —their romantic working and the nobility of their motives."

In the *nocturnes*, Chopin not only introduced the dramatic element, but displayed in a striking manner a marvellous enrichment of harmony of the resources of pianoforte composition. The F Sharp Nocturne is the most popular. Kleczynski finds that the doppio movement is extremely striking,

and the entire piece is saturated with young life and love and feeling of goodwill to men.

Chopin also deserves special honour for having perfected the *study*. Some of his studies serve purely technical purposes, but others are intellectually interesting. Heller wrote: "Chopin's Seventh Study engenders the sweetest sadness, the most enviable torments, and if, in playing it, one feels oneself insensibly drawn towards mournful and melancholy ideas, it is a disposition of the soul which I prefer to all others. Alas! How I love these sombre and mysterious dreams, and Chopin is the god who created them."

Niecks does not think Chopin created a new type in the *preludes*: "They are too unlike one another in form and character." The Sixteenth Prelude is the most brilliant. Full of imagination, life, caprice, and stormy dynamics, it is the darling of the virtuoso. Its pregnant introduction is like a madly jutting rock from which the eagle spirit of the composer rushes upward. The Fourth Prelude, in E minor, is, as Niecks says, "a little poem, the exquisitely sweet, languid pensiveness of which defies description." The Fifth, in D minor, is Chopin at his happiest. There is a dewy freshness, a joy in life that puts to flight much of the morbid tittle-tattle about Chopin's sickly soul. The Sixth Prelude, in B minor, is doleful, pessimistic. "It precipitates the soul into frightful depression" (George Sand).

The sixteen Polish songs published by Fontana after Chopin's death were written without any title.

If Chopin met with any new and beautiful poetry in his native tongue, he would set it to music, not for publication, but for his own pleasure.

The last mazurka, "Senza Fine," composed a few days before he died, is sad, very sad, like the last days of the great master. He showed by this swan song, and by his yearning after the hour of his happy youth, that in the very last hour of his creative inspiration he remained faithful to his national music and to his sorely tried fatherland.

Chopin introduced the mazurka into modern music. Although exemplified in popular songs, they are his sole property, because the master, while keeping the rustic and popular character of these national songs, has changed the form, enobled the melody, and enriched the contents.

In addition to Frédéric Chopin, Poland during the nineteenth century has given another musical genius to the world—Stanislas Moniuszko (1819-72).

In fact, if musical genius is characterized by loftiness of spirit and a wonderful subtlety of human feeling, if it is an extraordinary creative force, united to astonishing power to soar towards new regions hitherto unattainable, Moniuszko was undoubtedly a genius.

But as Mr. Polinski, a Polish musical critic rightly observes,[1] there are composers in whom genius is allied with talent, that is to say the faculty of adapting rules and known means to an end, theory to practice. Such were Mozart and Wagner.

[1] *Muzyka Polska.*

They realized the two essential conditions for giving complete expression to their creative power. Apart from these types of great musicians, Polinski admits two others, namely, where a great talent exists in conjunction with a lesser genius, such as Meyerbeer, and where a great genius lacks talent. Moniuszko, according to Polinski, belongs to the latter category of composers, and this is perhaps the reason that he is little known outside his own country. In his music Moniuszko paid too little attention to details, unimportant perhaps in themselves, but necessary to bring his genius into proper relief.

Although Moniuszko was not the originator of the opera in Poland, it is he who first created the National Polish Opera. The inspiration of his music is found in the atmosphere of national life, and is placed in a Polish *milieu*.

The influence of contact with nature, attachment to poetry and national melodies, have exercised a profound influence on his soul, and consequently on his music. All this is reflected later in the rhythm, the harmonies, and in the plasticity of Moniuszko's music. All this explains the extraordinary enthusiasm with which the first opera was received in Poland, when it appeared in 1858 at Vilno. It was the peculiar province of Moniuszko to touch and vibrate the unseen and delicate tissue of which the soul of a nation is composed, which explains the unprecedented success which his opera "Halka" gained in Poland, in spite of its technical and other imperfections. Polish critics agreed that

380375

the dependence of his genius on national elements was so strong, that every time he tried to give a more cosmopolitan and less national character to his music it was useless. His music lost in interest and value.

The limits of this study would have to be extended in order to do justice to all the Polish musicians, composers or artists, whose names belong to the history of modern and contemporary music in Poland. The names of Zelenski, Noskowski, Katski, Wieniawski, Paderewski, Mlynarski, Szymanowski, Ròzycki, Karlowicz, Stojowski, Statkowski, Opienski and others come quite naturally and instantaneously to the minds of the lovers of music.

Paderewski, like Chopin, possesses extraordinary lightness and exquisite delicacy of touch; he is certainly the great representative of Polish music abroad. His originality as a pianist virtuoso is beyond compare.

The musical genius of Poland which first established itself with so much force in religious music, which produced the Polish opera, and which has given to the world Chopin and Moniuszko, will not be lacking in many brilliant manifestations in the future. May external conditions, in the front rank of which stands peace and the realization of national independence, be favourable to its development in the years to be!

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